

Bible Tuesday for Pentecost Sunday, 2019

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

“They” are described in the verses immediately preceding this passage as “Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers...Numbering about 120 persons.”*

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

Wind and fire are believed by many pagan religions to be signs of the gods. In the Hebrew Scriptures, smoke and fire appear as signs of God's presence, leading the Israelites through the wilderness to the Promised Land, covering Mt. Sinai when God gave Moses the Law/Ten Commandments, consuming Elijah's sacrifice in front of the priests of Baal. In this passage of Acts, the wind is LOUD and concentrated to one house! Little bits of flame like things accompany the wind. The first hearers and readers of Acts would have immediately recognized this wind and flame as signs of God manifestation.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

In the New Testament, there are two different Greek which get translated as “language” or “tongue”. One Greek word means languages as in foreign languages. The other Greek word means spiritual utterances that may or may not be ecstatic and may or may not be understood by anyone except the Holy Spirit. In this Acts passage, the Greek word being translated as “language” is the one referring to foreign languages.

These disciples and apostles of Jesus would have spoken Aramaic, Greek, possibly Latin, and possibly Hebrew. None of them would have spoken the languages listed below. The Holy Spirit was speaking through them, bursting forth to proclaim the uncontainable Good News of God's love in Jesus.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

It is the festival of Pentecost, 50 days after Passover, is the celebration of God giving the Law to Moses. It would have drawn Jews from all over the Roman Empire and beyond to Jerusalem.

And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.

The disciples and apostles were not speaking Latin or Greek as most in the Roman Empire would also speak, but the native languages of each ethnicity, their native tongues.

Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

I am puzzled by how being drunk would enable you to speak a language you have never heard, spoken, or learned before.

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Now we learn the purpose of these signs of God’s presence, the fulfillment of prophecy! The pouring out of God’s spirit on all flesh, meaning all peoples, genders, religions and ethnicities. But this pouring out is not salvation. Rather, the Holy Spirit enables humanity to call upon the name of God, to have faith that God will act, and that is salvation.

Psalm 104:24-35

O Lord, how manifold (*countless varieties, shapes, sizes, species, animate and inanimate*) are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.

There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

Leviathan is a mythical, massive creature that haunts in the depths of the ocean. Jews believed God made this creature merely to show what He can do, for His own amusement.

These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

God is in control not only of the creation, but the continuation of life: food, water, shelter, reproduction, purpose, life, and death. “Dust” refers to nothingness both before and after existence. The psalmist is stating that God creates “ex nihilo” or “out of nothing”. God speaks and the creation becomes. As long as the created thing receives life from God, it exists. As soon as God pulls its breath from it, the created returns to nothingness again.

May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works— who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. *The “glory of the Lord” is the reputation of God, the wonder that God is known for, which in this case is creation. The psalmist is praying that all which God has made exists forever and not return to nothingness, that God would be happy with creation and perpetuate it.*

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.

Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

Romans 8:14-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Paul's use of the word "spirit" gets a little confusing here. In Greek, the word is "pneuma" which most commonly translates "breath". We can get confused because we think of the Spirit of God, or Holy Spirit as a being, part of the Trinity. But then Paul talks about a spirit of slavery which we would understand as more of a mood or a thought process. To confuse the matter more, Paul then refers to "our spirit" which somehow hears something from God's spirit. Many people interpret this "our spirit" as the soul, that which goes to heaven when our dead bodies remain.

But let's look at this using the most common translation of "pneuma" which is "breath" for each of these "spirits".

"For all who are led by the Breath of God are children of God. For you did not receive a breath of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a breath of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Daddy!" it is that very breath bearing witness with our breath that we are children of God..."

Now, let's replace "breath" with "life" or "Life source" since breath is the true sign of life. Rocks don't breathe but leaves and fish and mold spores and mammals do.

"For all who are led by the Life of God are children of God. For you did not receive a life of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a life of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Daddy!" it is with that very life bearing witness with our life that we are children of God..."

Does that make a bit more sense? God fills us with breath, life. That life from God is to enable us to live not as slaves to sin but as children adopted by God. As actual children of God, we may call God Daddy just as toddlers cry for Daddy when they need rescuing

John 14:8-27

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

In our first lesson, the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples and apostles in noisy wind and flamey things all at once. In John, the Holy Spirit is much more subtle. In John, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, the advocate (as in Court Appointed), the counselor. The intimacy that Jesus has with the Father will be replicated between disciples and the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus' authority comes from God and God does his will through Jesus, so will the authority of the disciples come from the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit will do its will through the disciples.

The gospel of John teaches that as long as Jesus is "in the world", he is God's presence in the world, but when Jesus "goes to the Father", that makes room for the Holy Spirit to be "in the world" and manifest itself in the very beings of the faithful, making church, making community, doing "greater works."